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Enemy Capabilities and StrategiesI. Strategies to the Present

Early in 1964 the decision was made in Hanoi to introduce combat units into South Vietnam with the goal of providing a sufficiently powerful military force to topple the already politically and militarily weak GVN sometime during 1965. However, by the end of 1965, it apparently became evident to Hanoi that NVA units in the south could not cope with the superior firepower of US forces and infiltration was further accelerated.

By the end of 1966 the NVA/VC combat forces in South Vietnam had more than double and totaled 100,000 troops most of whom were located in GVN MRs 1 and 2. During 1967 NVA forces were built up steadily in MR 3, where the largest number of VC forces were already concentrated. MR 3 became a major battleground in early 1968 as enemy forces attempted to mass against Saigon; during the year 21 NVA battalions were redeployed from MR 2 to MR 3. The war in MR 4 remained in the insurgency stage until 1967 at which time GVN/VC MR 4 Main Forces were rapidly built up for the Tet 1968 offensive.

Heavy and widespread fighting again erupted during a May-June Offensive in 1968 and a major focal point was again Saigon. Throughout the remainder of 1968 the general level of enemy military activity remained relatively low as enemy units recovered and rebuilt from their inordinately high losses. By mid-1969 it became evident that the Communists were deemphasizing the Main Force war in favor of indirect fire, sapper attacks, harassment and terror. This shift in strategy was the Communists response to

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the lesson of Tet 1968 -- that they could not achieve decisive military results on the battlefield in SVN against the combined strengths of the GVN and Allied Forces.

The new strategy of protracted war was probably intended to conserve strength against the day when the bulk of the US Forces departed. But the ouster of Sihanouk and the Allied operations in Cambodia altered the nature of the war substantially, creating new problems -- and opportunities -- for the Communists.

II. The Enemy Manpower Situation

The enemy's combat forces in South Vietnam have been eroded significantly over the past three years from the pre-1968 buildup for the Tet Offensive.

Regular Combat Forces Strength

December 1964	40,000	
December 1966	100,000	..
January 1968	195,000 - 215,000)	Net reduction from pre Tet 1968 high
December 1970	110,000 - 125,000)	85,000 - 90,000

The capabilities of even the current eroded force has been further diluted by the deployment of some 25,000 troops to Cambodia and 5,000 troops to Laos, even though these combat forces could be quickly redeployed back to South Vietnam. The combat forces now actually in South Vietnam total only 80,000 to 95,000 troops.

To alter this trend the enemy faces choices which depend on:

a) his willingness to commit more troops from North Vietnam, b) his capability to recruit in South Vietnam, and c) his casualty situation.

A. North Vietnam Manpower Capabilities

Hanoi has provided an enormous input of manpower for the war in South Vietnam -- some 800,000 since ¹⁹⁶⁵~~1959~~. During the period 1965-1969 -- when the pool of able bodied manpower should have grown by several 100,000 -- it has been reduced from 1.8 to 1.2 million. However, Hanoi still has the capability to continue the war at present levels or higher. The annual draft age class pool is currently about 150,000 youths.

This capability notwithstanding, manpower considerations must have played an important role in the debate that led to the protracted war strategy. While Hanoi's rhetoric reflects a continued commitment to the ultimate success of its original war goals, it also makes clear an unwillingness to take manpower losses at the high rate of 1968.

B. Recruitment

The ability of the VC to recruit military manpower and maintain indigenous forces in SVN is a function of the control situation.* VC recruiting has followed a marked downward trend since the peak year of 1968 and probably was no more than 40,000 in 1970. In a related trend, VC Guerrilla units have been depleted and their quality lessened as a result of combat attrition and large scale upgrading into the Regular Combat Forces. An increasing number of NVA fillers have had to be placed in VC Local Force units.

C. Control of Casualties

In the past the Communists have exercised significant tactical and strategic control over their casualties in South Vietnam. During February 1968, at the height of the Tet offensive, VC/NVA KIA's totaled

*The control situation was relatively stable throughout 1967. The 1968 Tet Offensive caused GVN control to drop to 15 percent while VC control rose to over 45 percent. By September 1968, however, most of the VC control was in the GVN control area and the GVN control area has continued to

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nearly 40,000. However, only five months later, enemy combat deaths were less than 7,000.

Enemy KIA has been reduced during the protracted war period, but now appear to have stabilized at a range of 8,000 - 10,000 per month. Likewise, the average enemy KIA per enemy attack, which has been reduced during the protracted war period, also now appears to have stabilized suggesting that the enemy may have already reached a point of maximum efficiency in the utilization of his forces in this kind of warfare.

From the above two conclusions emerge: First, the enemy cannot avoid taking fairly substantial casualties even under the low profile war he is now waging and second, the enemy faces a situation where he must expect higher casualties if he adopts a strategy which includes an intention of improving his own control in the countryside at the expense of the Allies.

III. The Enemy Logistical Situation

Over the past five years the Communists have been reasonably successful in meeting the supply requirements of their forces in South Vietnam because of a dual supply system -- the Laotian and Sihanoukville channels -- and because they successfully adapted the system to changing combat requirements. This has now all changed. Virtually all of the supplies will now have to come down through the Laotian Panhandle which means that the enemy will have to increase its effort there, to expand and protect the system and to cope with interdiction. All things considered, however, we believe that the Communists while hard pressed will be able to move enough to supply their forces in I and II Corps and northeastern Cambodia at the 1969-70 levels of activity. The more serious

problems for the Communists will be the delivery of these supplies and their distribution to forces within MR 3 and MR 4.

IV. Current Developments

South Vietnam

There are no intelligence indications that the Communists are preparing to depart from their "economy-of-force" military strategy in the near future. While infiltration started a few weeks earlier this year the tempo does not suggest a major expansion of forces. Current infiltration patterns suggest that as many as 23,000 personnel are destined for the COSVN area. These troops could be used in either South Vietnam or Cambodia. In addition, another 3,600 men are going to other areas of South Vietnam.

Cambodia

Cambodia seems to be a good bet for increased military activity during the current dry season. We are not, however, able to determine from infiltration patterns enemy intentions there.

The Communist campaign in Cambodia has thus far seemed designed to secure new logistics routes, to harass the Cambodian LOC's and to disrupt the economy and general control situation as much as possible.

South Laos

There is clear evidence that the Communist strategy in southern Laos during the current dry season is to focus on widening and strengthening their Panhandle supply system which must now serve all of South Vietnam. During the past several months the Communists have undertaken a considerable augmentation of security and logistics forces in the Panhandle -- possibly as many as 25,000 - 30,000 troops. The Communists have expanded their logistic system westward and established a new logistic organization in

the extreme southern Panhandle. Understandably the Communists show worry about Allied ground attacks in their area and it is not unreasonable to assume that they may take steps to secure the Bolovens Plateau.

V. Alternative Enemy Strategies

The strategy chosen by Hanoi over the next year will be governed to a large extent by their capability and willingness to furnish the necessary levels of manpower and logistical support (see the table). The enemy has a fairly wide range of strategy options from which to choose but all will require more support effort than was the case a year ago. Even the lowest cost option -- continuing the protracted warfare strategy throughout Indochina -- will require infiltration arrivals in South Vietnam to increase from the 1970 rate of 60,000 to a level of about 100,000 personnel simply to maintain force levels. This input is clearly within North Vietnam's manpower capabilities. It is only with those strategies involving a high level of sustained military activity throughout Indochina that the manpower requirements -- in the 200,000 - 250,000 range -- increasingly become a constraint on Hanoi's options.